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GSA PANEL ON ARIEL RIOS MURALS

MONDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2006, 9:30 A.M. - NOON
THE RONALD REAGAN BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C.

PARTICIPANTS:

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Transcript by: Federal News Service, Washington, D.C.

BART BUSH: Good morning, everyone. Welcome. Thank you all for coming. My name is Bart Bush, and I'm the assistant regional administrator for the National Capital Region for Public Building Service, GSA. We are here today to join in what we hope will be a meaningful and informative discussion and dialogue about several murals at the Ariel Rios Federal Building. On behalf of the U.S. General Services Administration, GSA, we appreciate the fact that you have taken the time to be here today, and we look forward to the next couple hours of discussion.

But first, I want to introduce GSA as the federal agency responsible for stewardship of the murals and give you a brief background about GSA's fine arts collection. GSA provides a full range of real estate services, real estate acquisition and disposal, property management, construction and repairs, security services, and overall portfolio management. The public building service is the largest public real estate organization in the country and has an inventory of over 342 million square feet of workspace for over a million federal employees in 2100 American communities.

Just within the National Capital Region over 300,000 clients count on GSA to deliver world-class work environments and to support their agency's workforce and missions. Here in the metropolitan D.C. area, GSA provides federal employees with over 90 million square feet of space and 151 federally owned buildings, including 70 historic buildings of which seven are national landmarks, and 500 lease locations.

GSA's fine arts collection of more than 18,000 works dates back more than 150 years. The works are in federal and other buildings across the country. Consisting of various styles and materials, the majority of art work, whether it be monumental sculpture, or large-scale murals has been and continues to be specifically commissioned and integrated into the buildings during the time of design and construction.

This is true of the works of art at the Ariel Rios Federal Building. They were announced March 1st, 1935, as the first national project to embellish the building with romantic subject matter in the history of the post office. The building originally functioned for the Post Office Department and is currently the home of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Today the murals are the focus of this public forum, which has been organized to listen and to learn from each other in the spirit of fostering appropriate civil discourse, reflective of our democratic values. They have brought us together to give you a voice, the public. Whatever your professional expertise or personal opinions are, we welcome your thoughts and views, and consider all of them important to this process.

I would like to thank those of you who have come from the public today. I would like to thank our panelists who have taken time from their busy schedule to share their points of view. I would like to introduce our moderator for the day, Mary Case to start our program. Mary is a Washingtonian, a consultant who has worked on arts, cultural issues for 25 years, particularly issues of change, leadership, and conflict resolution. Thank you very much for being with us this morning. Mary, please join us.

(Applause.)

MARY CASE: Good morning.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

MS. CASE: Good morning!

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

MS. CASE: I gave you coffee. (Applause.)

I'm privileged to be with you this morning to engage in one of the most powerful of all human activities, the act of listening. We have an unusual opportunity here as we have many points of view, some of them quite divergent. We are privileged, too, because everyone in the country has a stake in what we do here today. First of all, the people of the nation paid of the Ariel Rios Building, and the 25 murals commissioned in the 1930s to tell the story of the U.S. Postal Service, which at the time occupied the building. The American taxpayers have continued to pay for the building's maintenance and for the conservation and care of the murals for more than 80 years.

So with our simple, powerful act of listening today, we are tied to our grandfathers and mothers, and in this traditional way, despite the barriers of entry -- the distant for some, the difficulty of leave time for your jobs, even the security issues of getting to this building today -- in this traditional human act of listening to one another, we are tied to our grandparents, our children and to their children.

Six of the murals in the Ariel Rios Building are now contested because of their content by the employees who work in Ariel Rios and some visitors to the building. This contestation is the narrow subject of our discussion today. The much broader subjects of our discussion include:

- Identity,
- Stereotypes,
- Censorship,
- Aesthetic and historic integrity,
- The idea that art and monuments deserve our protection,
- The nature of change and the veracity of the historical record over time,
- The idea that respect means different things to different people,
- And that a single individual in the American democracy does have the right and the responsibility to voice his or her opinion.

And sometimes we are privileged to listen. Today we will listen as part of the 106 process.

The process we are engaged in has a number, as all things in a bureaucracy. As it turns out, this is a very good number to know – 106. This process is a formal, prescribed way for the government to listen to its citizens. Mr. Gary Porter, the person who is managing this process, who has convened this panel, will explain the 106 process to us in a moment.

As part of the 106 process, under Mr. Porter's direction, I have created a panel intended to bring in a variety of voices: a philosopher, an arts educator, art historians, curators, and historians with different specialties in aspects of art, identity, and culture. Two members of our panel are themselves Native Americans. Each member of the panel is highly qualified to speak to you about the subject at hand. You have got the shortest snippet of a biography as a handout. I hope everybody was able to pick up a copy of that on his or her way in. If not, we will be happy to provide that to you.

I'm going to introduce each panelist in a moment. In addition, we will get a short explanation about where we are in the Federal Triangle complex from Mr. Robert Weinstein, a historic architect. All comments made today -- mine, yours, the panel members -- will be taped. The tapes will be transcribed. The transcripts will be posted on the GSA website. We are scheduled to end today at 11:30. If we need to, we can go until 12:00.

I am fearful that we won't get to everyone's comments today. Those of you who would like to make comments and for whatever reason are unable to come to the podium, are welcome and encouraged to send your comments to Mr. Porter, and those comments will become part of the historical record.

If you would like to make comments today, we have a form you can fill out,after the panel, and during the break so we can organize people coming up to the podium or speaking from the microphone, whichever you feels comfortable. We do have to have you speak from the mic so we can tape. If you will fill out one of these at the break, we will organize together. We will have a little huddle, and we'll figure out how to make those comments happen.

We also have other wonderful handouts that have been prepared, geographical and historical context for the murals at Ariel Rios and material prepared by Mr. Weinstein.

I'm going to introduce both Mr. Weinstein and Mr. Porter. Mr. Weinstein will speak first, and then Mr. Porter will talk about the 106. Robert Weinstein is the co-founder of Architrave Architects. For over 30 years, he and his firm have concentrated primarily on preserving historic buildings in and around the Washington, D.C., area. He will provide a brief overview and historical context of the Ariel Rios building, and the murals.

Gary Porter is the acting historic preservation officer here in the National Capital Region. He is responsible for the process we are engaged in. He will provide us with an explanation of the 106 process in general, where we are in this process in particular, and where we are going. At the end, Mr. Porter will come back and he will tell us specifically about the next steps in the process, after we have had the panel and your comments from the public. So, Mr. Weinstein.

ROBERT A. WEINSTEIN: Thank you, Mary, and good morning, everyone. Did everybody get one of these handouts? Does everybody have one of these? Or if you don't, if maybe somebody is next you, you can share with them because the little pictures here are important to understanding what I'm about to say.

I'm going to provide a very brief introduction to the Federal Triangle, what it is, where it is, it's architecture and the murals. If you would look at your handout and flip past the cover page, what you'll see is, of course, a little map of Washington, D.C., and a little red triangle, which is, indeed, the Federal Triangle. Some people haven't realized this, but it is a triangle for which Pennsylvania Avenue, the ceremonial parade route between the United States Capitol and the White House is the hypotenuse. Along the base is Constitution Avenue. It faces onto the Smithsonian buildings and the Mall. On the Western end, 15th Street, bordering on, again, the Ellipse and the Commerce Building.

So we then we have an enlarged view of the Federal Triangle. And one of the things you'll notice is all of the red roofs of those buildings, and then an enlarged view of the Ariel Rios Building, which is an integral piece of the Federal Triangle.

The next page is a simple map showing nine out of the 10 buildings of the triangle, listing their dates of construction and their architects. The 10th building, which completed the Federal Triangle, is the one that we are in today, the Ronald Reagan Building.

The following page, which is just a little collage of photographs. On this page, I hope you'll see the really extraordinary collection of classical revival structures, rich in elaborate detail. Seven of the buildings, including the Ariel Rios Building, and if you'll flip to the next page, you'll see pictures from the Ariel Rios Building, (formally known as the New Post Office Department were built in a period between 1926 and 1938. They all housed major governmental agencies.

Following the picture pages, there is a timeline. The timeline has some things in boldface and other things in regular text. And the boldfaced items are events which are particularly about the murals and how they came to be and why. The other things establish what was going on in the country or in the world to give you a sense of the time period. Basically it's the New Deal era.

The McMillon Commission plan, which was developed in 1901, 1902 was largely influenced by the 1893 Columbian Exposition and the City Beautiful Movement. That laid the groundwork for the Federal Triangle, a collection of distinguished office buildings that would assert the power and permanence of the government. This is really the building of our nation's capital.

The Buildings Act in 1926 set in motion plans for the Federal Triangle, a development of 6-million-square feet on a 70-acre site. Then Secretary of Treasury, Andrew W. Mellon, and a distinguished board of architectural consultants headed by Edward Bennett developed design guidelines for the site. The buildings were to have a harmonious monumental overall design, expressive of the dignity and the authority of the federal government. Limestone facades, red-tile hip roofs, classically inspired colonnades are common features of the Federal Triangle Buildings.

The Ariel Rios building was designed by the architectural firm, Delano and Aldrich, and constructed between 1931 and 1935 to be the headquarters for the U.S. Post Office Department. It was intended to be the central feature of the Federal Triangle. The building has two seven-story, spiral marble staircases on its interior. The murals we are speaking about today are in lobbies directly off of these monumental staircases. Art

is an integral component of both the exterior and the interior of the buildings of the Federal Triangle.

In 1934, as part of the New Deal, the section of painting and sculpture was established to secure suitable art of the best quality available for the embellishment of public buildings. This is early New Deal. In 1935, the section announced the first national project to embellish the Post Office Department with, as Bart had said, romantic subject matter in the history of the Post. This was a competition. From 1935 to 1938, 25 murals were created for the newly constructed Post Office Department. Six of these are the subject of today's discussion.

In 1949, the federal property administrative act transferred all of the functions of the federal works agencies, which included this New Deal artwork to GSA. In 1966, Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act, and designated the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic site, which includes the Federal Triangle. GSA therefore became responsible for the stewardship of the historic buildings and their preservation and conservation. If there were to be a proposed change in any character-defining element of any of these designated buildings, a Section 106 process must follow.

And now Gary will explain to you more about what that process is. Thank you.

(Applause.)

GARY L. PORTER: Good morning, everyone. I'm Gary Porter with GSA, and I'm managing the Section 106 consultation for the Ariel Rios Murals. I'll take just a few minutes to briefly describe the Section 106 process that GSA has undertaken on the murals. Following that, I'll talk about where we are in the process, and then I'll follow up with the purpose of today's forum.

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as Robert described, requires that federal agencies take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties. As you now know, the Ariel Rios Building is considered an historic building and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Any program or project undertaken by GSA that has an effect on historically significant elements of the Ariel Rios building requires a Section 106 review.

Some people have asked the question: at this moment, GSA doesn't really have an undertaking on how to address the murals, but the 106 process can also be used as a planning tool, and that is how we are applying 106 at this point in the process, to understand, to solicit public comment and expert testimony or comment, so GSA can be fully informed, and aware for any kind of decision making that we will undertake.

An important element of the Section 106 review process is the inclusion of members of the public in the discussions, on the effects a particular project will have. Participants in the consultation on the Ariel Rios Building typically include the D.C. Historic Preservation Office, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and members of the public, also known as consulting parties.

Consulting parties for the mural consultation include the National Congress of the American Indians, the Society of American Indian Government Employees, also known

as SIAGE, and the Lawyers Committee of Civil Rights Under Law. This group actually is representing a number of EPA employees who have sought to have legal counsel for their position. Mike and Dorik Mechau, sons of the muralist, Frank Mechau, and other federal employees who have expressed an interest in the project.

The consultation on the six Ariel Rios murals is intended to address objections raised by visitors and federal employees at the Ariel Rios Building on the appropriateness of the murals, including complaints that the murals stereotype Native Americans, and that they contain images inappropriate for the workplace. The six murals include:

- "French Huguenot in Florida," by Karl Free;
- "Opening of the Southwest," by Ward Lockwood;
- "Consolidation of the West" by Ward Lockwood;
- "Pony Express" Frank Mechau;
- "Dangers of the Mail," by Frank Mechau;
- "Covered Wagons Attacked by Indians," by William Palmer.

I would like to briefly give you the history of the consultation to date and where we will be going with that consultation. The consultation was initiated in May of 2005 with a letter to the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office. The first consulting party meeting was June of 2005. At that meeting, we discussed the use of a website to help facilitate public comment and the sharing of ideas and gathering of information. That website was posted in October of 2005, and immediately after that, we started a public comment period that ran for 60 days, and concluded on December 31st, 2005. Today we have received over 400 comments as a result of the website being posted.

In May of 2006, I completed a summary of the comments and posted that on the website, which has led us to where we are today, October 30th, for the public forum. Following the forum, we will – as Mary described, the forum will be transcribed and placed on the website. That will initiate a second comment period. We anticipate getting the transcript will take about two weeks to post, and we would like to complete the second comment period by December 31st of '06, which would give us approximately 45 days of opportunity for comment.

Following that, I'll again do a summary of the comments and a report on the consultation that I will give to GSA's regional administrator. At that point, GSA should have sufficient information to make a decision on the murals.

I would now like to state the purpose of the forum. For today's forum, we have assembled six panelists that will discuss the murals, and the artistic and cultural issues that are relevant to the controversy. The primary reason for the forum was to generate a discussion that could be shared with members of the public that have not had the benefit of hearing a discourse on the murals, other than what has been posted on the website to date.

It was GSA's intention to create such a discourse by assembling today's panel and posting the discussion on the mural website. In addition to the panel discussion on the murals, we will also post comments received from the audience, as well as comments from the consulting parties in an attempt to create a balance of ideas that is inclusive of many perspectives.

I would like to close my comments by emphasizing that while the Section 106 process is a regulatory requirement for federal agencies, it is a beneficial and effective tool for GSA to hear and understand public views. We use it quite often very successfully on a variety of issues. I want to thank everyone for coming today and being willing to speak and participate. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. CASE: I wonder if the panel would now come up. As we have alphabetical streets in Washington, I wonder if the panel will come up and sit alphabetically with Ranya Green closest to me here, and then the rest of you arrayed – (chuckles). And if you wonder what you are, alphabetically, you are alphabetically according to the bios we have created. It's Rayna, it's Hilde Hein, it's Connie Kieffer, it's Mr. Byron Price, Paul Chaat Smith, and Sharyn Udall, in that order.

Rayna then Hilde – you're going to sit here. Then Connie Kieffer, Mr. Price, Mr. Smith, Ms. Udall. I am actually not going to sit up on the panel. I'm going to sit down here and ruthlessly keep time for them. They can see this (2 minutes sign) – they can see this (0 minute sign) – (laughter) – and if they see this (OFF sign), it's really bad. So let me introduce you to the panel please. It is my pleasure to introduce you.

First speaking will be Dr. Rayna Green, curator and director of the American Indian Program at the National Museum of American History. She has been writing and thinking about identity and how it changes over time for at least two decades in my own personal knowledge.

Second, we will hear from Dr. Hilde Hein, professor emeritus of philosophy, at the Holy Cross College, and author, this year, of a book called "Public Art: Thinking Museums Differently."

Connie Kieffer is an arts educator who has spent part of her illustrious career working on new-deal murals in Highland Park High School in Chicago.

Byron Price understands art of the American West as well as anyone in the country today. I'm particularly grateful to him for bringing this perspective to us.

Paul Chaat Smith is associate curator of the National Museum of American Indian. One of the topics he thinks and writes about is cultural politics, and perhaps we will hear something along that line from him.

Sharyn Udall brings the considered sensibility of an art historian who understands the American Southwest. She understands deeply the art of the Southwest, its people, its geography, and its history.

I'm asking each of you to respond to the fact that objections have been raised by the visitors and federal employees of the Ariel Rios building, about the appropriateness of six murals, including complaints that the murals stereotype Native Americans, and that they contain images that are inappropriate for the workplace. The murals are located in elevator lobbies and on upper floors through which agency employees and visitors pass, as we saw last night. We had a tour.

However, these murals are integral to the historic fabric of the building, and are part of a collection of 1930s New Deal Art that embellishes the buildings of the Federal Triangle, as we have heard. They are commissioned to adorn and enhance the architecture, paid for with public funds, and belong to the American people. They depict the historic and cultural ideals of the country at the time they were created.

You each come to the issues with a rich and varied background, personal, professional, and intellectual. Will you provide us with your insights on these apparently conflicting points of view? Rayna, will you start?

MS. GREEN: In the last 20 years, I should say, as a public servant, as a curator, and as a social scientist who has studied, as Mary said, not only American identity, but I have devoted a lot of special attention to the images and representations of American Indians, and even more particularly to images and representations of American-Indian women.

So I have been on the firing line from both ends as a museum person whose business it is to exhibit and care for all sorts of art, but with those considerations in mind, the kind of things that have interested me. I have sort of been on both the receiving and shooting end of issues that arise with the display of certain artifacts in art. I have lived in the middle of the debates, over the repatriation not only of ancestral remains but also of culturally significant property. I have been in the middle of the debates over intellectual property and who owns the rights to the display of certain objects and images.

So I have been there in the center of it. I have been at the center and involved in all of the critiques and confusions that have initiated at the Smithsonian from the display of art very much like we see in the Ariel Rios Building. Some of you who have been in this town may remember the controversies that ensued after the American Art Museum's display of paintings in the West as America, and the interpretation of those paintings, which are absolutely relevant to the discussion here today. So, been there, and – like I said, on both ends. And sometimes these discussions – it really does depend on which end of the gun you are on as to what conclusions arise from the discussions.

These particular paintings are certainly of interest to me. But I have to put them in context of the rest of the entire town of Washington. I would like to say that if we really want to consider these paintings in the context of what you see in Washington in general, the entire town is a hostile work environment. (Laughter.)

If you would like to go up to the U.S. Capitol and visit the rotunda of the Capitol, you will see sculptural works, you will see paintings, you will see friezes carved into the wall that represent the official mythologies of the history of the United States. You will see from fore to aft, Pocahontas saving Captain John Smith. You will see the first Thanksgiving. You will see Columbus landing in America. You name it; it's all there. You will see Indians robbing stagecoaches and massacring people.

You will see Custer's last stand, which by the way – Pocahontas saving Captain John Smith and Custer's last stand in the 19th century were the two most numerous representations of U.S. history in the whole country. They were hung everywhere and in various forms, paintings, sculptures, whatever, in various forms all over the country, including – they were Custer's last stand and various versions of it were the favorite in

bars across America. So you can see that, you know, everywhere from the U.S. rotunda to a nice saloon out in Denver – you could see these mythologies.

And I call them mythologies. They are essentially the collective founding mythologies of American history that were mostly – most people don't know this – mostly invented in the latter part of the 19th century. They had not been in existence since time immemorial since the 16th century when these things started putatively to take place. They represent mythologies in that they simply represent the winning sides' version of how American history goes down.

And in fact, almost all of them didn't happen. They are not good representations of history, neither are the murals in the Ariel Rios Building. They represent a kind of collective mythology that everybody learned in schoolbooks, and this was the mythology that was commissioned. It's commissioned all over town, and it bears no resemblance to good history.

So we have that problem. We also have the problem that the particular ways in which many of these things are represented in their artistic styles; they are reiterations of paintings and sculptures of the past. So you see, they just carry the inherited baggage of one painting from 200 years ago, or one sculpture from 200 years ago, some of which were about Greek and Roman life, by the way, or they were 19th century French historical representations of Roman history, and these paintings reiterate some of those things.

They also carry the clichés, the popular clichés of the time. Many of the paintings in the Rios Building, as do other works all over town, carry whatever was popular at the time in art, particularly Southwestern art, so you get the bison skull or the cattle skull, you get all sorts of things that are simply – well, let me put it this way: simply ordinary. And for me, these paintings are remarkable – not – most of them – I reserve a little bit of concern about the Mechau paintings. They are different in some ways. Most of them are not remarkable for their remarkability, but for their ordinariness. They are just simply common, and as such, you know, should have a whole different historical sensibility brought to them.

As Mary is giving me the hook, one final comment; that is just simply to put these paintings in the context in which they exist. What to do with them is a whole other thing. The one thing I know is that my job as a public servant is to explain the stuff we put up for the public. And that means explaining even the controversies, explaining the inaccuracies, explaining the ways in which the art we have commissioned and displayed deviates from historical truth, deviates from historical norms, or deviates from the way in which people bring their opinion to it.

And so I think to question them in whatever way we can bring our questioning of them to the floor is nothing but good. Past experience indicates to me, though, that whenever we do that, we are going to get the assault from the other end. Anytime in this town, at least, in which we have put up something that questions, or we interpret something that questions the conventional mythology, assaults it, we are going to get it assaulted back and probably taken down. I have never seen any work that has questioned authority and conventional authority in this town stay up for very long. Usually the method is to withdraw public funds from that exhibition.

So we do have a problem in the way we treat such art; we do have a problem in the way we question it, but I do think we have an absolute obligation to do so, and that can take many forms.

MS. CASE: Thank you, Rayna.

(Applause.)

HILDE HEIN: Can you hear me if I speak through this? Okay. I would like to begin by calling attention to one of the inscriptions in the federal building: *What is past is prologue*. We are part of that history. That history includes not only what is past, but also the current discussion of it, and the possible, I don't want to say revision, but reconsideration of it.

So I want to begin by just briefly saying that the WPA program was fundamentally intended to provide work for unemployed artists, and it was explicitly socially progressive. I think quite consciously so with respect to Blacks, less so with women, and I think not at all when it comes to Indians. I can say from my own experience growing up in that period that we played cowboys and Indians, and the Indians were always the bad guys. That a consciousness that I think is prevalent in this country now, at least in parts of it, did not exist at the time.

Recently I have come across a book that Hampton Sides, some of you may know, called *Blood and Thunder*. He is discussing the career and the mythologization of the career of Kit Carson. Throughout that book there are representations of the winning of the American West where Indians were described uniformly as varmints and savages and where the murder of dozens of them at one moment, thousands of them all together was considered heroic. That was very popular literature at the time, read throughout the country in dime novels. That is I think the background of the murals that we have just seen.

It's a historical accident that the Ariel Rios Building originally housed the Post Office Department, and I learned from some of the literature that we received that the artists were in fact given subjects to paint. So they were explicitly told to produce art that related to the subject of postal delivery and more or less do. There is considerable latitude there, but they more or less do that.

Now the building is used for a totally different purpose, so that is pretty much irrelevant. I think it was also not anticipated that there would be a number of Native Americans employed in that building, which is the case now. In terms of that historical background, there is no compelling reason for exhibiting the art in that location.

I think that it should be taken seriously that the environment is offensive to people who work there. I think it's also important to think of it as offensive to some of the people who come there on other business. And they don't come to see the art by in large; they come to take care of whatever business it is that brings them there. So the presence of the art, and the purposes to which the building is now put, are no longer integrated as they once were.

I think the issue of the aesthetic quality of the work is a factor, but maybe not the primary factor. It would be in a different environment. I happen to think that aesthetically

speaking some of that art is quite good. But I'm not sure that that is relevant. I think that under the circumstances, a more important consideration is that people who come in and out of the building for whatever reason they do, ought not to be gratuitously subjected to something that is insulting and harmful -- harmful in the message that it conveys.

I think that obscuring the art by putting up screens, which is the case in at least one of them, is not a solution to the problem. On the one hand, it calls attention to the art, without enabling people to see and understand it, and on the other hand, it's simply a crude way of dealing with the subject. In the case of four out of the six items that we are talking about, they are on canvas, which means that it would be in principle possible to remove them without destroying them. In the case of two of them, they are frescos, which makes it more of a problem. But I understand that they were removed previously to be restored – and so – I mean, this is a technical problem, but it has to be addressed.

I want to say as a recommendation that the American Art Museum in Washington has an extensive WPA art collection. In a museum there is every consideration to show work with extensive explanation and ways of enabling people to look at both the past and the present history. It seems to me that would be a way of resolving the problem. I don't think the work should be destroyed; that should be clear. I think that it should be shown, but it should be shown in a context where its history and the present controversy can in fact be explored.

I think that pretty much sums up what I want to say.

(Applause.)

CONNIE W. KIEFFER: I want to thank you for this opportunity today to share my passion about the art and architecture of the New Deal era. The arts – as an arts educator, the arts are a universal language, and this opportunity brings us together to talk about how the art helps us communicate about our feelings, both present and past and future.

The murals that we are looking at today that are controversial really do tell a story, as do all murals. And I want to tell you three stories about three other murals in the Chicago area that have experienced controversy.

In 1995, a young girl, Hanna Field from Chicago called me at Highland Park High School in Highland Park, Illinois. She was doing her metro history project on New Deal murals, and she said: *Our high school had murals*. I didn't see them anywhere, so I did an all-call, and low and behold, we had one faculty member who had graduated from Highland Park in 1955, and he said: *Oh, I remember those murals; they were in the library, which was torn down in '55*. He said: *Let's go see if we can find them in the attic.*

Long story short, they were in the attic. They were the only thing in the attic – nine panels done by Edgar Britton. We brought them down. And one of the maintenance men, who was helping us carry them down – they were quite large – said: *The only reason we kept these murals is that they are on plywood, and if we had any broken windows, we could use the wood to cover it until the glass was replaced*. So much for valuing art.

As we began to study these murals, we found that they were done by Edgar Britton, who was one of the three outstanding New Deal muralists in the Chicago area. He had studied with both Grant Wood and Diego Rivera in Mexico. He also did a mural here in the Interior Building in Washington, D.C., and many others.

Were these murals particularly controversial in subject matter? Probably not, unless you were a woman. They represented nine different industrial scenes. They contained all white males. But one of the things that became controversial is on the workman's gloves, there were red stars. So someone began to ask, what was Edgar Britton's leanings in terms of socialism?

So Dr. Andrew Hemingway, from the University College in London came to Highland Park to research Edgar Britton, and was he a leftist artist. And I'll leave that story to you. You can read his book, called, *Artists on the Left*, which was published in 2002. But that did create some controversy. We were able to get them cleaned and restored, and we used them for curriculum integration.

At the same time, in Chicago, Flora Doody is a teacher at Lane Tech High School. And she walked the halls and saw many murals. And she began to work and clean and restore with students the 69 murals at Lane Tech High School and other sculptures. She raised over a million dollars through cookie sales and dance marathons and things like that to clean and restore this fabulous set of murals.

She, with Barry Bauman, and Heather Becker, of Chicago Conservation Center, began to explore other Chicago public schools, and found over 400 murals from the Progressive and the New Deal era. One of the sets of the murals from the New Deal era in Lucy Flower High School became very controversial. They were painted by Edward Millman. They are fresco and they depict significant women of that particular era. He finished them in 1940 after two years work. In 1941, the all-male Board of Education from Chicago Public Schools decided that they should be painted over because, to quote from a news article in the Sun-Times newspaper, *They were too depressing, too misery-laden, and too subversive.*

They included women such as Harriet Tubman, Lucy Flower, who started kindergartens; Francis Parker, Jane Adams, Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Clara Barton of the Red Cross. They were covered until 1997 when the principal of that school, a woman, finally was able to secure funding, through the help of the Chicago Conservation Center, to unearth them. They are absolutely fabulous. They are still there today, although the school just recently closed. We hope that Chicago Public Schools will continue to maintain those particular murals and recognize their importance.

One of the things that I think about with respect to those murals is that George Biddle, who was one of the early leaders in the New Deal Mural projects – there were four of them – said one of the purposes of the projects was to identify and be conscious of American life and its many social problems. And those particular murals of women really did that.

A third story that have to tell you relates to Indiana University, where my son attended college. In that particular mural, in 1933 Thomas Hart Benton made murals of the history of Indiana for the Century of Progress in Chicago. When that World's Fair was finished, they were taken to Indiana University and mounted in three different

locations, three different buildings. Over the years, one of the sets of murals in Woodburn Hall became very controversial because it depicted, as part of Indiana history, robed members of the Ku-Klux Klan, which was founded in Martinsville, Indiana, right next to Bloomington, burning a cross. It also – this mural also includes an image of a white nurse taking care of a black child.

While historians say these images represent Benton's best efforts to display the full array of Indiana history, both positive and negative, some students objected to the KKK image. In 2002, Dr. Brehm, the chancellor of IU, came up with a three-part plan related to those murals and their controversy. First of all, she said, anyone that goes into that building, Woodburn Hall, where those murals are located, will be instructed and educated about the context of those murals and why Benton painted them and used that subject matter.

Secondly, she set up a fund called, One for Diversity. The whole purpose of that fund is to raise money to create more art and more art of diversity so that Indiana University can celebrate that diversity and put up current art that more appropriately represents and celebrates diversity. And finally, she set up orientation programs for all stakeholders at the university about the importance of celebrating and understanding diversity.

Why do I tell you these three stories? I think some of the murals at Ariel Rios Building are controversial – obviously; that is why we are here – but they do represent from the artist's perspective, the artist's understanding of history at that particular time. So we understand the context. Secondly, the Great Depression was a horrendous time, and the artists were instructed to look at showing the difficult times during the Great Depression Era.

Lastly, as an arts educator, I feel compelled to note that three of the four artists whose work we are discussing today became arts educators – John Lockwood taught at University of Texas, Frank Mechau at Columbia University in New York, and Colorado Springs Art Center, and William Palmer started the Art Institute in Utica, New York. And I think the importance of an arts education, and understanding that context, and being able to connect what the artist is saying to our own lives is an extremely important aspect of understanding what we need to do with the Ariel Rios murals. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

B. BRYON PRICE: Good morning. My name is Byron Price, and I am the director of the Charles M. Russell Center for the Study of Art of the American West at the University of Oklahoma. I come this morning with a background that includes not only an academic appointment, but for the previous 25 years, I served as curator and director of several different museums in Texas, Oklahoma, and Wyoming. Each of these institutions had art and artifacts broadly interpreting the history of the American West. So this is not my first rodeo – (laugher) – as they say in our part of the world.

I think that Rayna has certainly pointed out some of the problems and difficulties that Western American Art has faced over the years, particularly since the "West as America" exhibition heightened our sensitivities to the kinds of messages that some of the artworks emanate.

Western American art, among all American art forms, is the only one where the value and the significance of the art is tied to its accurate depiction of history and its narrative message, its fidelity to the historical analog. Yet "West as America" reminds us to look at these works not merely as illustration but as art that has a creative impulse, an interpretive bent, the artists' own personal baggage, as well as cultural baggage. And I think it's a mistake to simply look at these works for whether or not they are an analog to history.

If you were to look at all of the murals – we're only concerned here with six, but all of the murals, they are all stereotypes. And one might ask is a benign stereotype that avoids controversy any less destructive as a form of expression than those that openly expressed conflict?

There have been several occasions over my career when these issues have come into focus. At the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, there is a rather prominent sculpture by James Earl Frasier called, "The End of the Trail." It's something of the magnitude of 20-feet tall, and it had been a part of the Panama Pacific exposition of 1916. The previous director had negotiated for its removal from Mooney Park in California to the museum in Oklahoma City. It sat in an area in back of the main museum in its own space, with a roof that seemed to bear down on the Indian's back as he slumped over his horse.

And, when we decided to expand the institution, we had to deal with the idea of what to do with this work. It is not easy to move a work of several tons, an imbalanced kind of situation just from a physical standpoint. In looking at what we were going to do with this, we decided that rather than to gunnysack this problem, or potential problem, because there are people to whom this symbol is negative, rather than to move the work off site or move it into storage, we decided to deal with it up front. We moved it to the very front of the building and showcased the work in order to discuss the issues that this work, this great icon of the West engendered.

We asked a Native-American scholar, Dave Edmunds, to provide a native response to this work, which went along with additional commentary from James Earl Frasier, the original artist of the work. We incorporated that into all of the educational materials, to all of the docent materials. The opportunity to discuss in an open way, day after day after day, has done more, in my opinion, to undermine the stereotypes that the work engenders than all of the other efforts than we might have made.

So there are options, and there are ways to deal with this image, and these images, in situ or not. Our choice is important. And I would rather have an open discussion, an open interpretation – I was delighted to see the interpretation that has begun. If we make it someone else's problem, it is still a problem. Thank you.

(Applause.)

PAUL CHAAT SMITH: Good morning.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

MR. SMITH: My name is Paul Chaat Smith. I'm a Comanche Indian, and since 2001, a federal government worker, employed by the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian. My position there is associate curator.

I have been generally familiar with the Rios murals and issues they raise for some time. When Mary Case asked me a few months ago to take part in this morning's discussion, I thought about it for a day or two and then decided to say yes. I said yes because I find the issues interesting, relevant, and complex. Most of these issues, about the way histories are made, remade, and understood, and how art shapes our understanding of the past, and the marginal space native people inhabit in American history, contemporary life and popular culture are not new to me.

But the reason I said yes is because I didn't know how I would answer the key question. Are these murals so offensive that they should be removed from public display in the Rios Building? Perhaps I should have said no because this morning I still didn't know how to answer that question. Maybe that answer will come to me in the next five minutes, maybe it won't.

Art and history are two human enterprises that one should always approach with deep skepticism. They are lousy at providing specific answers to specific questions. On the other hand, successful practitioners of art and history are splendid at creating new questions, sowing confusion, and making you doubt things that you thought you were certain of.

I want to thank the General Services Administration for organizing a process that engaged these difficult issues. I want to express solidarity with my fellow Indian workers who find these murals intolerable. One of the things that makes them intolerable is that on some level, as Rayna observed, the entire city of Washington is a hostile work environment for Native people. Thousands of Indians live here, but we are mostly invisible, except for murals in federal buildings, monuments, place names, and a certain professional sports team, few of which portray us in positive ways.

About the murals in question, I like most of them. They were created by artists, not historians or ethnographers. And I don't care about their alleged inaccuracies because the artists were not ethnographers or historians. To me, the murals convincingly tell the stories they were intended to tell, stories of conquest and manifest destiny, with passion and verve. They reflect American worldviews of eight decades ago, and should be evaluated as works of their time.

I know it isn't easy to look at it this way, but as far as representing us, to me they are like comic books or something. That is not us up there on those walls. But I'm a professional curator and I don't have to look at them every day. I'm also Comanche and I'm not offended when Indians are portrayed as barbaric killers because, you know, that used to be our job profession. (Laughter.) Pretty much every horrible thing people said Comanches did, we did. Mostly we did these horrible things to other Indians. But we did get out of the barbaric killing game a long time ago.

Although his work isn't on the list, I was especially taken with Rockwell Kent's 1937 mural that features secret political messages from an Eskimo to a Puerto Rican nationalist. Kent was apparently referencing a police attack on a nationalists rally in Ponce, PR. And the written message in the mural from the Eskimo says, "To the people

of Puerto Rico, our friends, go ahead and let us change chiefs." (Laughter.) "That alone can make us equal and free."

Regarding the six contested murals, I read them as both monuments and case studies of the dispossession and disempowerment of American Indians. So in that sense, they couldn't possibly be more accurate.

In closing, I want to congratulate the GSA, the petitioners who object to the murals, and the artists who painted them. I think the screens that obscure some of the murals are interesting, and the history of the screens are even more interesting. I read somewhere that this building we are in right now is the most expensive ever constructed by the federal government, and I love the fact it's named for that Hollywood cowboy, Ronald Reagan. (Laughter.) The world and this city are preposterous. (Laughter.) Thanks for listening.

(Applause.)

SHARYN UDALL: Thank you. I'm going to speak from here, if I may. I'm Sharyn Udall, and I would like to offer two comments from my perspective as an art historian.

What we have heard today and what you already knew, are a couple of obvious things, that visual images are extremely powerful in all times and in all places. They can teach, they can narrate, they can inform in other ways, and they can cause intense reactions of various kinds.

The history of art, from the ancient time forward, is full of examples of controversial art, some of which has been removed or defaced. I site a few examples. In ancient Egypt, it was not uncommon for new pharaoh ascending the thrown to deface, literally to have chiseled away the faces on the images of previous pharaohs whose accomplishments or reign they wanted to obliterate.

Moving forward in time, there is the familiar example from the Renaissance period of Michelangelo's painting, not of the ceiling, but of the far wall of the Sistine Chapel, that very last mural of "The Last Judgment." Michelangelo painted that fresco full of monumental nudes in various sizes. It's overwhelming. (Laughter.) A subsequent pope, during the period of the counter-reformation when certain values had changed, when nudity in art that had been so celebrated by the human essence of the high Renaissance had gone out of fashion, that later pope commissioned another artist to go in and add draperies to the offending parts of those monumental nudes, altering the original intent and appearance of those Michelangelo sculptures.

Much closer to our own time, we have the resounding example of the murals of Diego Rivera from the 1930s in Rockefeller Center in New York. You know this story I'm sure. He had partially completed the murals, which were about struggles of mankind, and he had -- in opposition to the sketches and the plan he had earlier submitted, he inserted the face of Lenin in those murals. When the Rockefellers found out about this, they ordered him to stop and then to remove the face of Lenin. Rivera refused to do that and so the mural was jack hammered off the wall in a still uncompleted state. Fortunately Rivera was able to reconstruct that mural the next year at the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City.

Even closer to our own time, we have the example of Richard Serra's, “Tilted Arc.”

Now there are many other examples. I just cite these because they are well known and they are sources of continuing controversy that are taught today. These are in the art history books; they are discussed. Now the patronage of those particular works of art, I am very aware, and I point out to you is quite different from the murals we are discussing today. They were in some sense private, but in some sense public, but mostly private patronage. And the old saying, he who pays the piper calls the tune, is invoked, certainly in understanding what happened there.

But my point is that history has not dealt kindly with those who go back and second-guess artists whose work was completed or nearly completed because perceived values have changed, because time has altered in some way the reception of those images, and that when those things have been done, it has been done with the scowling countenance of history looking upon it.

I also want to mention the specific charge that went into creating the murals in this office building that we are talking about. In 1935, when the section of painting and sculpture announced this first national project to embellish the Post Office Department, the phrase they used was, “with romantic subject matter in history of post.” That word, “romantic,” raises a huge flag for me because, as you know, from the past, the word, “romantic,” in connection with visual arts, literature, and music, is all about excess. Romanticism is over-the-top, intentional, emotion-evoking artistic production of whatever kind it is.

So it is often violent. It is often sentimental, nostalgic, tragic, a hyperbole in every way – goes into the image of romanticism, and as concerns Native Americans from the 19th century forward, when they were portrayed it was, as has already been suggested, as the image of a dying race often, or alternatively an idealized figure in complete harmony in nature. The Taos Society of Artists, for example, most often invoke that stereotype of Native Americans.

The work from the past of Rubens and Delacroix will be familiar as examples of the predecessors and practitioners of romanticism as all about being over the top. So when these artists were specifically charged with producing romantic subject matter, and they were for better or worse working in an inherited European tradition, for the most part, of visual art production, it’s not at all surprising that some of these excesses and stereotypes were invoked as part of that romantic charge to them.

Now I would also like to say that I was privileged yesterday to make my first visit to the National Museum of the American Indian. I have not been in Washington since it’s opening. And I have to say that I was absolutely thrilled to be there to see the stories, the representations, the interpretations that were made of the history and the artifacts, the traditions of native people by those people themselves. I heard a very effective tour guide talk about telling stories, about combating stereotypes, about renewing the tradition and the history of native people through their own efforts.

So I think that is an extremely powerful and positive presence for Native Americans in our nation’s capital. And then later yesterday when I saw for the first time

these contested murals, my feeling was inevitably these are so insignificant in comparison to that major positive statement that is made by that new institution and its contents and the work that goes on there. I'm not minimizing the message of – especially Frank Mechau murals or how they are interpreted. Certainly there are objectionable things in them, but to me, they sort of fade into the wallpaper in comparison to these powerful and positive examples and measures that we have, especially through the National Museum of the American Indian.

So, in summary, let me say that as a recommendation, I would like to suggest that more education be done about the context for these murals, their history, why they were done, how the artists were trained and thought in that era of the 1930s, and that education is much preferable to any change, alteration, veiling, or removal. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. CASE: Well, I am so very, very, very pleased with the way this panel has unfolded. I think from now on, every time I have a panel, I will just ask them to speak alphabetically. (Laughter.) It's really, really nice.

We are almost to the 11:00 hour, and in order to make sure that I have as much time as possible for anybody who might like to speak, what I would like to do is ask the panel to step down, have a break, and anyone who would like to speak publicly, if you could meet with me now, we'll see who would like to speak, who would like to ask a question or make a comment. I'll just meet with you as we have, let's say, a 10-minute break, and then we will reconvene. So anybody who would like to speak with me, we can just meet, and we will figure out how we can do that, how many people would like to do that. I'll be right here.

Let's thank the panel again really. Thank you so much.

(Applause.)

If we have time, at the end of – we can bring them back up here and they can talk a little bit more. We would love to hear more from each one of them.

(Break.)

MS. CASE: Thank you for coming back, ladies and gentleman. We're going to stay with our alphabetical theme. My principal job in this next slightly less than an hour is to keep time for people. So we have eight speakers, and they are (JoAllyn Archaubault , Shana Barehand , Jason Edwards, Kit Farwell , Cinda Hughes , Nigel Simon, Sacheen Smith), Lori Wendle . So could we have first JoAllyn , who I have known slightly personally and since 1986, anyway? Thank you so much for coming. I'm sorry you couldn't make the panel this morning.

JOALLYN ARCHAUBAULT: I am reading largely from a letter that I submitted last year in '05, but somehow it didn't get on the website for God knows what electronic reasons. But I am in sympathy with that. So I am going to read most of it, and I'm submitting a written copy. And I'll submit an e-mail copy to whomever.

I must add my voice to those who are unhappy with the continued exhibition of some WPA murals currently exhibited in the Rios Building. Upon initially viewing them, I immediately understood why the EPA employees want them removed or concealed in some way, as they are offensive to a modern understanding of Native Americans and their place within American history and modern society.

The WPA produced tens of thousands of artworks in different media, and employed thousands of artists, writers and musicians in their construction during the Great Depression. Some of the artists employed were Native American themselves, and some of the artworks produced were more respectful and accurate images of American Indians and their place in regional history. The Rios Building pictures are not among those images.

The paintings in question, to my mind, are by artists Mechau – whom I'm probably mangling his name – Palmer and Lockwood, present Native Americans as more like savages, killing helpless civilians and raping naked white women. In earlier times, paintings such as these were used as propaganda, rousing popular sentiment against the enemy, whether British, Germans, Japanese or godless Russian communists. While propaganda might be understandable during wartime, it is inexcusable now; particularly when the heathen savages are now American citizens, many of who have served their country in the armed forces and lost their lives in the process.

The paintings were intended to be iconic symbols of the conquest of America's enemies and the establishment of a nation during a time of national insecurity, the Great Depression. Moreover, in the nation's capital, the designs chosen for the walls of the Rios Building stressed the opening of the country – Lockwood and Free; the savagery of its Indian enemies – Mechau; the establishment of national public institutions like the mail system under threat from barbarian natives – Mechau; the attack of immigrant wagon trains – Palmer; and the final subjugation of Native Americans – Lockwood. The coverage of the paintings was national in that expansion from the Atlantic to the west – Lockwood. In all images, Indians are either barbarians wrecking havoc on helpless civilians, or a defeated individual yielding to the power of the robust United States – Lockwood.

While this portrayal might be understandable during the period of its creation, as one would have to remember that racism and ethnic intolerance was very much a part of the national fabric of the time; it is totally unacceptable now. This country has experienced 50 years of civil rights struggle and counter-racism campaign, and it is no longer possible to tolerate such images of blatant racism on the walls of a federal building. I suggest that the GSA remove these paintings and transfer them to the National Museum of American Art, where they could be available for research and would join an already existing collection of WPA art.

In addition, reason for their removal is that the painting "French Explorers and Indians," by Karl Free, is a crude rehash of the original painting by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues of a meeting between Rene Laudonniere and I'm mangling his name too a French Huguenot commander and Athore, son of the Timucuan chief Satouriona, leader of a Florida tribe near the modern town of Mayport. This took place in late June 1564. The vertical structure that you see in the middle of the painting was erected by the

earlier French explorer, Jean Ribault in May 1562, and claimed the countryside for the French king, according to European customs of the time.

While there have been some changes in the painting, it would have been more honest if it had been titled after Le Moyne, which would acknowledge the artist's debt to the original painting. But the image was not widely known at the time, and Karl Free may have thought that no one would be familiar with the original, or the engraving by Theodore de Bray , of the original painting.

Collectively, the images do not convey a welcoming environment for either the EPA Indian employees, the frequent Indian visitors to the department offices, or for any American who is aware of the power of images.

While these images can be understood within the historical context of their creation, they no longer belong in a public setting such as the Ariel Rios Building. I think a reasonable and responsible solution to the situation would be to remove the paintings from the wall, and transfer them to the National Museum of American Art. The curators at NMAA are familiar with the complexities of art creation and are well qualified to interpret the historical context for their audiences.

After submitting the above letter last year, I find the same conditions endure, the same paintings on the wall, and the same bureaucratic resistance in place. Much public money has been spent in the pursuit of overwhelming, not addressing, the objections of the Native employees in the Rios Building and those Indians who visit it. If this money had been spent in the removal and donation of the paintings to the NMAA, and the purchase of art created by contemporary Indian artists on the subject of the natural environment, we would not be here today, and the public trust would be better honored than I see now. Thank you.

(Applause.)

SHANA BAREHAND: First, I want to say thank you to GSA for holding this forum, and for working with us. I was at EPA for nine years. I was the employee that had to look at these murals every morning when I came up the elevators to the fifth floor. My name is Shana Barehand; I'm Mono Indian from California. We were a peaceful tribe, of nomadic people, small in nature. We would have gotten massacred by the Comanches, had they been around. But luckily, we were in California. My kids are Navajo and Gila River.

My experience at EPA – when I first got there, I was a new attorney, I got hired there and I didn't even have a place to sit. I met a guy – it was my first experience being here in D.C. around non-Indian people that didn't know anything about Indian people at all. I had a guy tell me, gee, I wish I was Indian so I could sit around and smoke peyote all day. So it was apparent to me that I was again going to be subjected to the stereotypes that people have about Indians.

I just wanted to tell another story. I used to work for the Southern California Indian Center, and we took the students out on a camping trip. We had a van and the van said Southern California Indian Center. As we drove through town, we saw the white kids shooting at us. I'm not sure if the other students in the van saw that, but I saw that. As an Indian person growing up in society, a lot of us have been subject to those

types of stereotypes. You get really sick of it. And you start really feeling bad about yourself. I don't want my kids to feel that way when they're growing up.

I understand Mechau's noble intent on showing that the Indians were winning. And I understand that's why he painted the paintings, so this isn't personal against the artist. I'm just advocating that we remove those murals. I have since left the EPA, because after seven years of dealing with this issue, it was not going anywhere. Anyone who works for the government realizes that things move at a – I don't know – not even a tortoise's pace. But I realized that I would have to remove myself from that situation, so I have since left EPA. So I'm advocating just removing those murals. I know that they can be removed because they were removed for three years to a more suitable place. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. CASE: Jason Edwards, please?

JASON EDWARDS: Good morning. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to address the distinguished panel and Mr. Porter and the rest of the GSA. My name is Jason Edwards. I am a 14-year veteran of EPA. I am also Seminole from Florida, and I have African descent as well. I'm not going to stand here and tell you that these paintings are wrong. We all know they're wrong. We all know they are inaccurate. That's beside the point. They are wholly inappropriate to display at my work site.

I have no problem with art expression. I have a minor in art photography, as a matter of fact. As well as being an environmental justice coordinator for my office, I am a photographer myself. And to be subjected to this kind of intolerance on a daily basis is just not something that I should have to deal with, or you should have to deal with as tax-paying members of the American public. The building – the Ariel Rios Building – used to house the postal service; it no longer does. There is a post office located in one of the lobbies, but EPA has taken ownership of the building, or residence-ship of the building.

Our mission is to protect human health. These murals offer no value in that mission whatsoever. They are offensive on so many levels. And if I may speak for one of my absent, used-to-be co-workers, Bob Smith, whose daughter I believe was in tears almost at the sight of her people – of my people being depicted in such a negative manner. I was not intending to speak this morning, but I felt moved. And I will leave you with one thought and one question – would we even be having this discussion if these murals depicted stereotypes against another race? Would we be having this discussion if the murals were, in fact, 13-feet high by 20-feet wide of, say, a young black man being lynched by Klan members? I don't think so. And I sincerely don't think so. And it's offensive to me, personally, that American Indians – or Native Americans – are just ignored and overlooked to the extent that we find this in art acceptable, in any context. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. CASE: Kit Farwell?

KIT FARWELL: I'm Kit Farwell, member of Comanche nation and an EPA employee. I'd like to thank Gary and Mary and our panel for being here. Regarding the

panel, all of you are very well expressed your thoughts, and you're all very good speakers and we appreciated that. Out of respect to you, I'll make my comments very brief.

Sometimes at EPA we like to bring our kids into work – sometimes for career day – and when the elevator door opens, our kids don't see period art, they see political art or propaganda that is offensive. And I would like for us to feel free to bring our kids in to see our offices, and I hope that the murals could be removed to a neutral setting where they could be viewed in context. Thank you.

MS. CASE: Cinda Hughes?

CINDA HUGHES: My name is Cinda Hughes; I'm a member of the Kiowa tribe of Oklahoma and a legislative associate for the National Congress of American Indians. The National Congress of American Indians was established in 1944, and is the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments. Depictions offensive to American Indians should not be present in buildings owned by the federal government. Currently, American Indian federal employees are forced to endure depictions of American Indians as savages, murderers and sexual predators within their workplace.

Not only must EPA employees suffer through such objectionable material in the workplace, but the images are also in the very area where tribal leaders must enter to conduct business in the EPA's Ariel Rios Building. These offensive depictions create an environment of racial harassment and must not be tolerated. Similarly, all such racially insensitive depictions of American Indians must be removed from buildings by the federal government to prevent the further oppression of American Indians in the workplace. These depictions offensive to American Indians impede a healthy government-to-government relationship between the United States and tribal governments. These offensive depictions disrupt institutions and processes designed to support meaningful and respectful government-to-government dialogue and consultation processes. I know that a lot of the work that I do when I advocate on behalf of tribal governments, both at the Capitol building and at other federal agencies across Washington, DC – sometimes, these are the only images that new congressional staffers, who have absolutely no history of or relationship with tribal governments or tribal peoples – these are the only images that they have in order to work from when I go in to represent tribal governments.

Many times, even those who might be chiefs of staffs for various Senate committees – for instance the Senate Committee on Energy and Resources – was wholly unaware of NCAI or wholly unaware of many aspects of tribal governments. And to have these images in places where we have to go and try to conduct government-to-government relations, and try to establish meaningful relationships – and also on a peer basis – this really impedes our efforts to advocate on behalf of modern American Indians, and modern American Indian tribal governments.

And it also has a very serious impact upon American Indian children and among students and their self-esteem and their sense of self-worth, and their own self-image. We have the highest rate of suicide among American Indian teens – men between the ages of 15 and 30 – in the United States, and the third highest in the world. And depictions – popular imagery – is something that is very important to youths. We have

television. We have magazines. We have the Internet. All of these different media images of American Indian peoples does have a direct impact upon the self-esteem of a people and also with our relationship with American citizens at large. Thank you.

MS. CASE: Nigel Simon?

NIGEL SIMON: Good morning. First I'd like to thank you all for this very informative session. I have learned a lot. My name is Nigel Simon. I'm an EPA employee, taxpayer and a voter. I work in the Ariel Rios Building, and I must say you do not have to be American Indian and/or woman to be offended by some of those murals. I am offended by those murals. I see them everyday. My children do come to work because I think, as a black man growing up in America, I have two sons – it's important to have them see positive images of everyone because they don't see that on a daily basis. And I would like to say with these murals, they are hurtful. They are painful. And it's not that – you could say it's easy to say it's history, what's done is done.

When you think about even stereotypical, negative images, they still hurt today. Things like the Birth of a Nation – I don't know how many of you have seen that – but whenever there's a call that goes out that a white woman has been raped or mugged, the first people they come after is who? Black men. So images hurt. They are painful. And I do agree that as a part of history, and we should teach them, but put them in the proper context. I think they should be in a museum so that way, if I want to see them, I could go see them. If I work in the building, I have no choice. And that's where I stand on the issue. I don't agree with destroying them because there are lessons of the past we need to learn so we won't relive them. But they should be in a museum. They should not be where I can see them every day. Thank you.

MS. CASE: Sacheen Smith.

SACHEEN SMITH: Good morning, everyone. My name is Sacheen Smith. I'm Navajo from Albuquerque, New Mexico, and I am currently interning at the EPA. And when I heard about these murals, it was very hurtful. I may not be able to see them – I'm actually kind of glad that I'm blind so I don't have to view them everyday when I walk into the EPA building. But on October 16, I was with a friend of mine and she was describing the murals to me. And we were at one of the ones that was the most offensive to us as a people, with the raping and killing. The elevator doors opened and a group of white males came out of them, and they were laughing and talking about the murals. And we were behind the screen, so they didn't see us right away. But they saw us. They looked at us, and they continued their behavior.

I've never felt so hurt and felt so much pain in my life. And just being an intern, having come to the EPA everyday, it's hurtful. It's painful for me. You know, I dread coming to work, and I'm supposed to be here gaining a positive experience interning in Washington, DC. But yet, the nation's capital has left me with thinking that the federal government is condoning such discrimination. I'm appalled by it. I hate walking through those halls. Every time I do, I wonder what's going to happen next? Who's going to be laughing and joking? And I'm just – I don't know – as I walk through these halls, I dread it and I just – to myself, I can just hear my ancestors weeping because this is not who we are as a people.

I just really, really urge the removal of these murals. What am I going to go home to tell people from my nation – that I worked in a place where they condone discrimination? That's not what they're going to want to hear from me. But that's what I'm going to have to tell them because that's how I feel. My heart is saddened by these depictions. I just really strongly feel that these murals need to be removed and replaced, and if they're not removed then we, as Native Americans should give our depictions through art. And they should be put up next to these murals. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. CASE: Our last speaker this morning is Lori Windle.

Lori Windle: Good morning. I'd like to first thank Gary Porter and the GSA for convening this panel. I know that it's a step in this process that we're going through, and I realize that it's not the ultimate thing that's going to be informing the decision-making of the GSA on the disposition of the murals, but I do appreciate the opportunity to speak.

I had not intended to speak when I came here today. I came from Denver, Colorado. I'm an enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa tribe. I work for the Department of Interior, Office of Surface Mining in Denver, Colorado. I'm the Western Region environmental justice coordinator there, American Indian special emphasis program manager. I also hold a bachelor of fine arts and a master of fine arts. I'm an independent documentary maker. So a little bit about my background. Also, I was one of the many founders, including Mr. Edwards and Ms. Barehand, of the Society of American Indian Government Employees, and I was their first chair – currently secretary.

I had not intended to speak today. I just wanted to see how things unfolded. I know that there is a rumbling in the Indian community about this forum in that no representatives of the civil rights – any civil rights experts – were included in the panel. And I realize that this is very narrowly focused forum on the 106 process. However, we would not even be in this room if it were not for the feelings of the people who feel that they have been discriminated against, and that's EPA employees. A number of those EPA employees came to the Society of American Indian Government Employees, also known as SAGE, in 2003 and asked for our assistance with this issue because they'd been going through their regular processes – through their management – and nothing was happening. So I've actually been involved in this for three years. Some of the people here have been involved much longer than that – six or seven years.

I think that a lot of this is already on the record from what I have submitted and what SAGE has submitted as far as our comments as a consulting party in this process. However, something new that I can add that you may not all realize is that we have SAGE – I say we – SAGE has the support of the National Coalition for Equity in Public Service, which includes Federally Employed Women, Blacks in Government, Federal Asian-Pacific Americans Council and National Image, which is the council of Hispanic employees on this issue. And they have all submitted their comments to the General Services Administration concerning the removal of these murals. And also, as Ms. Hughes indicated, we have the support of the National Congress of American Indians, which includes over 250 sovereign tribal nations. So it's not just a handful of unhappy employees that we're talking about here. All of these organizations represent hundreds of thousands of people who are objecting to the placement of these murals and the retention of these murals in this federal workplace.

I went to visit some relatives in Detroit last summer. And they took me to the Ford Museum. I'd never been there before, and what a wonderful place that is. It reminded me – I saw something that reminded me of this particular issue, because as the panel has discussed, as history moves on, there are differing moral values that can interpret how art is viewed and dealt with. As history progresses or moves on, I should say, there are differing moral values that the society itself embodies. The thing that brought this murals issue back to mind for me was the placement in the Rosa Parks area – they have the bus where Rosa Parks was arrested in that area – they have drinking fountains, one that says colored, one that says white. And I would like to say that I believe this is analogous to that in that forcing individuals who are offended by these murals to confront them everyday is a form of racism. Mr. Weinstein – he mentioned a word as far as the way that the murals were commissioned – or artwork is commissioned – in federal buildings. And one of the words that he mentioned that really stuck in my mind was authority. And that is, they were to assert the authority of the federal government. To me, by retaining the murals in place, particularly the most offensive ones, that to me is institutional racism, which is an assertion of the authority of the federal government over American Indian people and tribes. And that's all I'd like to say right now. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. CASE: So I think that alphabetical thing worked once again, I'm happy to say. We are past 11:30 now, and I think bringing the panel up for a second time for 15 minutes or so is probably not the wise thing to do. We'll just begin to get into a good conversation, and then our time will be over. I think the power of the final conversations – the comments that we've just had – is the much more important piece of the program, rather than having another final 15 minutes.

I'd just like to summarize that we have done, I think, what our hope was – is to hear a broad array of views. We've seen the complexity of these issues. We've thought about and seen the ways that these issues have changed through their context. We've thought about the possibilities of choice and change. We've seen that our hearts have been saddened by whatever choice we make. There will be people who are really saddened by whatever choices are made. So these are not simple things. They take time.

I want to thank each and every one of you for taking the time out of your busy day to contribute as you have; to listen; to be part of the grandfathers and grandmothers in your listening for yourselves and our children and our children's children. Thank you for coming. .

(Applause.)

(END)